

Vyas, Rajendra T.
GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND.

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GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND

By

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One of the problems a blind person faces is, independence in mobility. In order to lead a full life a blind person must be able to move about freely either with the help of a cane or a guide dog. The writer has had an opportunity to visit schools abroad training guide dogs for the blind and also to discuss with guide dog owners the pros and cons of a guide dog service. Given below are answers to questions put by the writer to The Seeing Eye, Inc., one of the largest schools training the guide dogs. The Seeing Eye was founded in 1929 and is located in Morristown, New Jersey. Other two organizations training dogs guide are, Leader Dogs for the Blind, Inc., Rochester, Michigan, and Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc., San Rafael, California, founded in 1939 and 1942 respectively.

Who can use guide dogs? Not all blind people can use guide dogs. Those too old and too young cannot control them. Some have poor health and their handicaps; others are temperamentally unsuited or simply lack the motivation to try to get around independently or to seek employment.

Aproximately how many of the blind people in U.S.A. use a guide dog? The number of dog guide users in the United States can only be estimated. In our opinion there are not more than 4,000 (maximum) guide dog users.

Is it true that there is an increasing tendency to encourage blind persons to use the long cane in place of the guide dog? I regret to say that among many of the general agencies serving blind persons in this country the tendency has been to discourage use of the guide dog. It is difficult to assign reasons for this without seeming to be prejudiced. In any event, we feel that one reason relates to the fact that some of the marginal guide dog organizations have placed poorly selected and inadequately trained dogs with blind persons who are unsuited to use them. Bad examples thus result and appear to be more memorable to some of the counsellors than the good examples. We have considerable evidence to prove that blind persons who use dog guides have a much stronger spirit of independence and personal freedom. When they obtain dog guides they are more apt to be returned to the mainstream of society and to avoid calling further on the general agencies for services, which often tend to become paternalistic.

Research studies sponsored by The Seeing Eye several years ago reveal that a large proportion of legally blind persons were not motivated to seek mobility training, either with cane or dog guide. Our Federal Government has heavily subsidized in recent years the recruitment and training of orientation and mobility specialists. The device they favour of course,

from: BLIND Welfare [India] 15
Vol. 11, No. 3
December 1969
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is the cane. With this increasing number of cane specialists in the field now, it is only natural that there should be an increased tendency to encourage blind persons to consider the long cane. Authorities still recognize, however, that The Seeing Eye has provided mobility for more blind persons than any organization and they realize they can learn something from us. Consequently, all of the Government-subsidized trainees in orientation and mobility visit The Seeing Eye for a seminar, as an official part of their program. Many of the more forward-looking members of these groups quickly see the advantage of a dog guide over the cane, especially for certain types of blind people. As a result, they are now often making direct referrals to us for dog guide training of those who have demonstrated the necessary qualities and who have expressed some dissatisfaction with the cane. They are often potentially good cane travellers, but they simply are not happy with the slower and more frustrating technique and they are repelled, we find, by the unhappy stereotype of blindness associated with the cane in the public's mind.

Is it correct that employers, especially industrial employers, do not like blind persons to bring in their guide dogs at their place or work? Our experience is that the so-called prejudices of employers toward dog guide users rest primarily in the minds of the vocational counsellors. In many cases they find it difficult to locate a sufficient number of suitable jobs for blind persons, and they give the impression that if a dog guide is also part of the picture, it will be even more diffi-

cult to obtain jobs. Our graduates report, however, that in very few cases have their employers ever expressed any doubt about having the dog guide at the place of employment, so long as the dog is well controlled. The great majority of our graduates of employable age are employed in a wide variety of positions. The enclosed summary is a witness. There are, of course, some job situations to which the adaptation of a dog guide requires some special assistance from The Seeing Eye, and we are always happy to provide this on request.

What is a monthly cost of maintaining a guide dog? In the United States today it is estimated that the cost of maintaining a dog guide is approximately dollars 15 (Rs. 120) a month. This would probably not include any veterinary expenses, which may average dollars 25 to dollars 35 a year. As with people, as the dogs grow older, they frequently require more medical attention.

What are the occupations which the present users of the Seeing Eye are engaged in? The Seeing Eye is being used by men and women in a variety of occupations. The following is a list of occupations of Seeing Eye Graduates:—

- 20 Agriculture
- 3 Artists
- 33 Attorneys
- 2 Auto Mechanics
- 3 Braille Workers
- 2 Broadcasters
- 78 Business Owners
- 8 Clerks

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| 5 | Computer Programmers | 8 | Salesmen (Magazine subscriptions) |
| 4 | Dark Room Technicians | 51 | Secretaries — Typists |
| 25 | Executives—Administrators | 32 | Social Case Workers |
| 38 | Factory Workers | 64 | Stand Operators (Government & Private Buildings) |
| 166 | Homemakers (No outside employment) | 88 | Students (College) |
| 22 | Home Teachers | 12 | Students (Other Training) |
| 31 | Insurance Salesmen | 7 | Switchboard Operators |
| 5 | Lecturers | 31 | Teachers (Elementary, Secondary, College) |
| 1 | Mining Engineer | 10 | Teachers (Schools for the Blind) |
| 14 | Ministers | 4 | Telephone Answering Service |
| 17 | Music Teachers | 2 | Weaving and Caning |
| 34 | Musicians | 35 | Workshops for the Blind |
| 5 | Osteopaths | 18 | Writers |
| 4 | Personnel | 14 | X-ray Technicians |
| 1 | Post Mistress | | |
| 19 | Physical Therapists & Masseurs | | |
| 1 | Police Dispatcher | | |
| 20 | Piano Tuners | | |
| 3 | Psychologists | | |
| 16 | Public Officials (Including Judges) | | |
| 61 | Retired — Independent | | |
| 38 | Salesmen (Mutual Funds, Office Supplies, Printing Supplies) | | |
| 31 | Salesmen (Door to Door) | | |

As to our question "Can guide dogs be effectively used in India as U.S.A.", Mr. George Wernitz, Jr., an official of The Seeing Eye states "From what little I know of the life and culture of India, it is our opinion that a dog guide program would face many difficulties there. Perhaps some day, however, an experimental program on a small scale might to be considered."



A minister, returning from an early-morning sick call, noticed a parishioner staggering home from the local pub.

"Let me help you to the door", he told the man.

At the door, the tipsy man urged the reverend to come in, but the cleric begged off because of the late hour.

"Please, reveren, just for a minute," he asked. "I want my wife to see who I been out with tonight."



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(Dec. 1969)

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